# Spelling Strategies:

# Make Smart Use of Sounds and Spelling Patterns

Young writers often try to use the sounds in words to figure out their spellings; experienced writers often use this phonetic strategy first, and then try other approaches, including applying common spelling patterns. So it is definitely worthwhile to help children hear the sounds in words by developing phonemic awareness, and then exploring sound/symbol relationships and spelling patterns — especially if you continuously encourage kids to think about how these strategies will help them as readers and writers. Here's how.

Strategy 1: Develop Phonemic Awareness

Strategy 2: Explore Sounds

Strategy 3: Discover Spelling Patterns

*Strategy 1: Develop Phonemic Awareness*

I find that children develop the ability to hear sounds in words when I involve them in lots of shared reading of poems, chants, songs, and big books with repetitive refrains and rhyme. I ask children to listen for and identify rhyming words, and clap when they hear them.

Select words children know — from books, rhymes, songs, and so on — and discover together how knowing one word can help with the recognition or writing of others, just by changing the beginning letter(s). For example, when reading the chant "Mary Mack" or the book Zoo-looking by Mem Fox (Mondo, 1996), write the words Mack, black, back, crack, quack on a chart. Invite children to suggest other words with the same sound: pack, sack, whack, track. Ask children, "How will this help you with your reading and writing?"

*Strategy 2: Explore Sounds*

Tell children you have noticed them listening for sounds in words they are trying to write — so you will help them discover how different sounds can be written. Reread familiar books, rhymes, chants, and songs, asking children to listen for words with a particular sound. List these on a chart; for example, words with a /k/ sound: kite, cat, school, bike, Christine, truck, cake, back.

Help children to identify the letter(s) that represent this sound. Underline these and ask children to group the words according to the different ways the sound is represented. For example:

kite, bike, cake

cat, cake

school, Christine

truck, back

Reinforce how the same sound may be represented in more than one way, depending on the word. This is important for children whose first language is not English, particularly if their first is a phonetic language, such as Spanish.

During the next few days, ask children to find other words they know with this sound and add them to the class list. I usually explain that kids must say a word to listen for the sound, and I do not confuse them by referring to the sound by a particular letter name. As other sounds are explored, ask children how this will help them with their writing.

*Strategy 3: Discover Spelling Patterns*

Tell the children that thinking about what a word looks like is a useful spelling strategy, so you are going to explore some common spelling patterns together. Reread a familiar big book, poem, or so on, selecting a particular spelling pattern to look for. For example, look for and list words with ea, such as: bead, bread, dead, instead, great, read, treat, break.

Ask children to identify and underline the ea spelling pattern in each word, say the words, and group them according to their pronunciation, such as:

bead, read, treat

bread, dead, instead, read

great, break

Select one of the words and show how knowing it can help with the spelling of other words in that word family. For example, great: greater, greatest, greatly, or break: breaking, breaks. Ask children to try this with the other words you've found. Talk about how thinking about spelling patterns and building on word families can help with reading and writing.